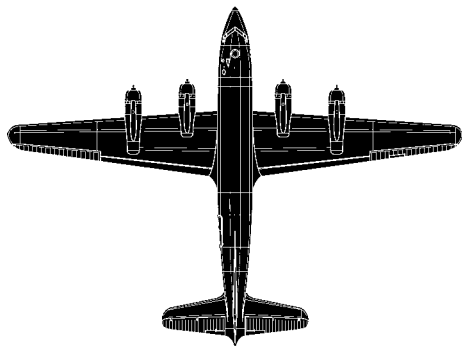


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

C-54 Skymaster



Born of World War II necessity, the C-54 Skymaster became one of the first great airlifters. It began as a DC-4, designed by Douglas for civilian use. After Pearl Harbor, US Army Air Forces pulled 24 off the line, redesignated them C-54s, and opened military production. The C-54 served with distinction not only in World War II but also in the Berlin Airlift and Korean War.

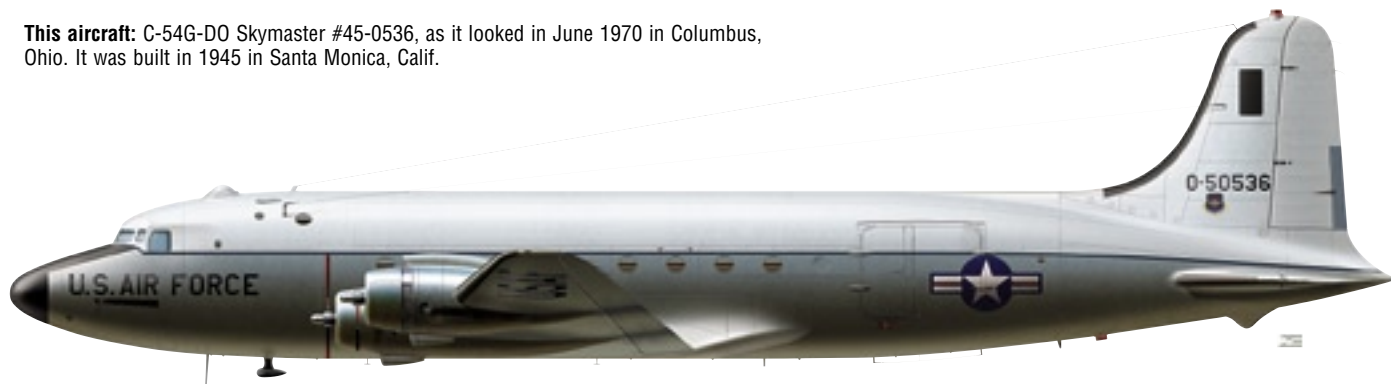
In the C-54, the US had, for the first time, a four-engined, long-range transport. Tricycle landing gear gave it a horizontal attitude, easing loading and unloading. It had a wide cargo door, strong floor, large wing tanks, and boom hoist for heavy freight. What's more, it was highly reliable; in 79,642 C-54 crossings of the Atlantic and Pacific, for example, only three Skymasters were lost.

The C-54 became the core of Air Transport Command's global system. By war's

end, 1,000 were in action, hauling trucks, ammo, supplies, paratroopers—anything and everything needed for war. C-54s flew one million miles a month across the North Atlantic—20 round trips a day. The VC-54C *Sacred Cow*—a modified Skymaster—was the first special Presidential aircraft, used by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. Winston Churchill and Gen. Douglas MacArthur also used C-54s for air travel.

USAF kept 400 C-54s in service after the war. At the height of the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift, USAF put 319 of them to work, and one Skymaster was landing at Tempelhof Airport every three minutes. Nine months after the airlift ended, North Korea invaded South Korea, and the C-54 was back at war. Eventually, this World War II veteran served in many other roles and remained in USAF service until 1972. It may still be flying in some corner of the world.

This aircraft: C-54G-DO Skymaster #45-0536, as it looked in June 1970 in Columbus, Ohio. It was built in 1945 in Santa Monica, Calif.



In Brief

Designed, built by Douglas ★ first flight Feb. 14, 1942 ★ crew of four ★ number built 1,163 ★ four P&W 14-cylinder engines ★ no armament ★ **Specific to C-54A:** max speed 265 mph ★ cruise speed 192 mph ★ capacity, 50 troops ★ max payload 22,000 lb ★ max range 2,000 mi ★ weight 62,000 lb ★ span 117 ft 6 in ★ length 93 ft 10 in ★ height 27 ft 6 in.

Famous Fliers and Passengers

President Franklin D. Roosevelt ★ Prime Minister Winston Churchill ★ President Harry S. Truman ★ USAF 1st Lt. Gail S. Halvorsen, "Candy Bomber" pilot of Berlin Airlift, 126 missions.

Interesting Facts

Made 31-hour Tokyo-Washington flight to deliver film of Japanese surrender ★ flew final mission of Berlin Airlift (Sept. 30, 1949) ★ first USAF aircraft destroyed in Korean War (June 25, 1950) ★ served in US Navy and 15 foreign air services.



USAF 1st Lt. Gail Halvorsen (the "Candy Bomber") dropped parachute-borne bags of candy to German children in the Berlin Airlift.